Juvenile Justice

CJ 3650

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Chapter 3
Measuring Juvenile Crime

- Fears related to juvenile crime reached new heights in the past two decades.
- Fear remains high despite falling juvenile crime rates over the past 10 years.
- The media focuses on high profile cases that do not accurately reflect the statistics.
The elusiveness of accurate juvenile crime figures

- Measuring total crime is extremely difficult
  - Singling out juvenile crime is equally difficult
- A decentralized juvenile justice system
- Confidentiality of records in the JJ system
- Many options dealing with juveniles
- Collection of data is often dated
Important terms

• Confidentiality restrictions
  – Laws keeping juvenile records confidential

• Correlates
  – Variables related to each other

• Risk factors
  – Variables correlated with delinquency

• Protective factors
  – Variables that insulate or protect from delinquency
Measuring the extent of juvenile crime

- Official records
- Victimization surveys
- Self-report surveys
Official Records

- Official statistics and measures are data collected by governmental agencies
  - City
  - County
  - State
  - Federal

- Uniform Crime Reports (UCR)
  - Most comprehensive official measure of crime
    - Part I offenses – Index Crimes
    - Part II offenses – less serious
Index Crimes

• The most serious crimes in the UCR
• Often referred to as “felonies”
  – Murder
  – Robbery
  – Rape
  – Aggravated assault
Part II - Misdemeanors

• The less serious crimes
  – Theft
  – Property damage
  – Assault

• For juveniles also includes status offenses
  – Runaway
  – Curfew
  – Truancy
Data

• **2003**
  - 1.2 million arrests of juveniles
  - Juveniles account for 16% of all arrests
  - 15% of all violent arrests
  - Arrests for juveniles for Violent Crime Index offenses has declined over past 7 years

• **Substantial increase in arrests for violent crime began in 1980s & peaked in 1994**
  - By 1998 the rate fell 19%
Juveniles & Property Crime

- Despite the declining rate associated with violent crime, the **Property Crime Index** for juvenile offenders has remained constant over the past 16 years.
Juvenile Court Statistics

• Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) collects data from juvenile courts
  – Automated case-level data
    • Collected by agencies at the case level containing details about the offender, victim, and disposition
  – Aggregate data
    • Collected by agencies on the overall number of cases or dispositions processed

• Funnel effect – the number of cases processed through the system decrease at each successive step in the process
Juvenile Correctional Data

- Another official measure of delinquency
- Tabulates the number of offenders committed to public and private facilities
  - These counts accurately indicate the number of juveniles incarcerated for delinquency
Pros and Cons of Official Data

• **Strength**
  – Reliable count of juveniles
    • Arrested
    • Processed
    • Incarcerated

• **Weakness**
  – Substantial number of cases are dismissed or handled informally
  – UCR reporting is not 100% accurate
UCR – Inherent problems

• Not all crime is reported to the police
• Many cases are handled informally
• **Hierarchy Rule**
  – When multiple crimes occur in one incident, the most serious is the one recorded
• The variety of dispositional options available in the juvenile system
Victimization Measures

• **National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS)**
  – Collects individual data on victims, offenders, and crimes
  – Provides a better picture of crime than the UCR

• **Strength**
  – More realistic picture

• **Weakness**
  – Surveys are sent to homes and completed by persons other than juveniles
Self-report Measures

- Gathered from surveys of youths who volunteer information about
  - Drug use
  - Criminal activity
- Three key studies
  - Denver Youth Study
  - Pittsburgh Youth Study
  - Rochester Youth Development Study
  - Collectively these 3 studies form the Causes and Correlates of Delinquency Program
  - A milestone in criminological research – constitutes the largest shared-measurement ever achieved in delinquency research
Pros & Cons

• **Strength**
  – Shows that juveniles commit many more offenses than they are arrested for
    • Possibly 100 offenses before arrest
  – Helps to probe background and reason

• **Weakness**
  – Data may not be accurate
    • Inaccurate memory
    • Exaggeration
    • Confusion
    • Outright lying
Trends in Crime & Statistics

• Juvenile crime rates, especially violent offenses, increased substantially during the later 1980s and early 1990s

• Possibly due to societal and cultural reasons
  – More single-parent families
    • The family nucleus may be disintegrating
    • Extended families are increasingly being spread across the nation
    • Gangs and pop culture
    • GenX
      – Remorseless, narcissistic, materialistic, and uncaring
• Other GenX factors
  - Availability of guns
  - Pornography
  - Graphic violence vis-à-vis violent imagery
  - Internet
  - Cable and other mediums
So why is juvenile crime down?

• **Punitive juvenile justice**
  – Offenders subject to increases
    • Sentences
    • Adult waivers
    • Less restrictions on confidentiality of records
    • More formalized processing

• **Changing societal values**
  – Educational programs
    • DARE
    • GREAT
      – Have helped change youth attitudes
• **Community policing**
  – Increased involvement of positive influences on juveniles
  – Filling parental voids
    • Mentoring
    • Improved supervision

• **Regression to the mean**
  – The spike of the 1980s and 1990s may be just that, a spike
    • The drop between 1994 – 2003 may be a regression to the mean

• **Incapacitation effect**
  – Increase in juvenile correction options
Juvenile Victimization

• Juveniles are more likely to be victimized than they are to offend
  – A five-year period (1985-91), 85-87 % of juveniles were victims of theft or violence
    • 25% were victims of serious violent offenses
    • 66% were chronic multiple victims
    • Most are both victims and perpetrators
    • Best predictor of victimization
      – Delinquent behavior
      – Friends
      – Males
      – Alcohol use
• Juvenile homicide victimization increased 66% between 1985-95
• Juveniles were victimized in 20% of family violence incidents
• 3 times more likely to be victim of simple assault compared to adults
• Many crimes occur at school
  – 75% of students report victimization at school
Risk Factors

- Juveniles have always been crime prone
  - Commit crime and delinquency for a variety of reasons
  - Juvenile crime is *multivariate* in nature
    - No single variable can explain juvenile crime or delinquency

- Casual and Risk factors
  - A casual factor is a variable that causes a juvenile to be delinquent
  - A risk factor is a variable, present or absent, that is correlated with delinquency

- Protective factor
  - A variable or characteristic that correlates with not committing delinquent acts
Risk & Protective Factors

• R&P factors can be categorized into six areas:
  – Biology and genetics
  – Personality
  – Family
  – Social environment
  – Ecological environment
  – Educational environment
Biology and genetics

- The concept of “born” versus “made” delinquents has always received attention
  - Much of the research in this regard has been haphazard and inconclusive
  - Low IQ has been linked to delinquency
    - Low IQ spans all economic and social levels
    - How IQ is developed socially or genetically has not been determined
  - Race
    - No difference between African-American males and whites in younger years – age 6
    - Differences gradually develop with age
• Gender is clearly a predictor of delinquency
  – Boys are more likely than girls to be involved in serious forms of delinquency
  – Males are more violent and arrested for more violent offenses than their female counterparts

• Family – research has assessed that family characteristics like
  – Parental criminality
  – Child maltreatment
  – Poor family practices
    • Are related to delinquency and drug use
Personality

- Research has shown that certain characteristics are predictors of future delinquency
  - Hyperactivity
  - Restlessness
  - Risk-taking behavior
  - Aggressiveness
Social environment

- The social environment for juveniles includes:
  - Peers
  - Social class
  - Activities
  - Interests

- These variables define the social world.

- The negative influence of delinquent peers will outweigh earlier development.
Ecological environment

- Research has shown that small areas within large cities typically have disproportionate levels of crime and violence.
- Juveniles living in these areas tend to be more involved in crime and violence as well.
Education

- Three broad areas related to education that foster risk or protective factors
  - The school itself
  - The juvenile’s attitude toward education
  - The juvenile’s behavior and performance in school
- Juvenile’s who do poorly, have weak/no ties to school, change schools, or drop out are more likely to be delinquent and use drugs
Behavior & lifestyle

- Delinquency generally follows a progressive path
- Less serious behavior often precedes more serious problem behaviors
- The Pittsburgh Youth Study identified three developmental pathways of delinquent behavior
• Authority conflict
  – Stubbornness before the age of 12
  – Progress to defiance and avoidance of authority

• Covert
  – Minor acts such as lying
  – Followed by minor acts
    • Property damage
    • Progresses to more serious acts

• Overt
  – Minor aggression
  – Followed by fighting and violence
Drugs and alcohol

• Which comes first, the chicken or the egg?
  – Research has not definitively determined the answer
  – Drug use has been correlated with adverse consequences

• National Institute on Drug Abuse (N=611)
  – 95% used marijuana 3+ times per week
  – 64% used cocaine daily
  – 80% carried a weapon all or most of the time
Other behaviors

- Sexual practices
- Health
- Safety
  - All are risk factors
- Promiscuity is major risk factor
  - Multiple partners
  - Unprotected sex
  - Use of drugs/alcohol